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ABSTRACT

The issue of program quality must be paramount on state educational agendas if the America 2000 preschool goal--that all children start school ready to learn--is to be attained. This paper describes four types of preschool programs (Project Head Start, Montessori, public preschools, and private day cares) and reviews the evidence on their effectiveness. First, Project Head Start's history, philosophy, and goals are discussed, as are the reasons for its popularity over the years. The paper next presents Montessori philosophy, goals, developmental theories, and curriculum, and distinguishes the approaches espoused by the Association Montessori International and the American Montessori Society. Then the paper examines the rationale for public school sponsorship of early childhood education; current state involvement in early education, as indicated by the preschool component of 1990 National Education Goals and the incorporation of preschool initiatives into state budgets; and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's research on quality indicators. Finally, the paper outlines the need for private child care; the range of programming options available; the difficulties in licensing; corporate and university day care; and state assistance provided to day care. Using this information, the paper recommends a model for public preschool programs that includes: (1) connections to service agencies to enhance family involvement; (2) effective teacher training; (3) attachment to existing public school buildings and interfaces with the elementary routine; and (4) curricular connections between preschool and kindergarten. (Contains 20 references.) (KDFB)

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A Preschool Model that Works

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If America is to meet the eight national goals established by the National Governor's Association and President Bush, then early childhood programs and the issue of quality must be paramount for state agendas in education. The first goal states that by the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn. This statement exemplifies the importance of belief in early childhood education.

According to Lewis (1993), we can no longer ignore the benefits of getting an early start with children. Research has shown that for every dollar spent on high quality early education, $7.16 is the eventual savings to the general public. This research has caused a tremendous increase in Head Start funding and opened a new door for public schools by offering school districts the opportunity to apply for funding through competitive grants beginning in 1990.

A growing body of research suggests that high quality early childhood education has positive and long term effects, at least in the case of disadvantaged children. According to Zigler (1985), the Perry Preschool Project in 1962 found those students (at age 27) who were enrolled in a preschool program attained higher education, higher economic status, and greater social responsibility than a matched group of children not enrolled in any preschool program. Over their lifetimes, the savings to American tax payers were tremendous.

Much of the research conducted in early child hood education has been empirical and experiential in nature. However, many programs seem to be started for the sake of child care rather than based on sound child development principles. If by chance, the programs follow any type of learning theory or educational philosophy, it has been by accident rather than planning. A review of Head Start, Montessori, Public Preschool, and Private Day Care Providers strengthens the function for the development of an effective preschool program.

During the last two decades the daily lives and basic composition of American families have changed substantially. Because the majority of women with very young children are now in the workforce, the care and education of young children has emerged as a significant national issue

(Hauser-Cram, Pierson, Walker, Tivnan, 1991). Moreover, the percentage of children living in poverty has increased substantially. In many communities parents and policy makers have begun to look at particular preschool programs for assistance. Indeed, the mission and responsibility of the public schools in the education of young children have become a central part of the debate about public solutions to a host of social problems, including inadequate child care, disenfranchised parents, fragmented services for multineed families, and early school failure. This growing concern has been the foundation for the establishment and improvement of current early childhood programs. Head Start was one of the earliest attempts to fight war on poverty and provide a connected service to parents, children, and community.

Programs

Head Start

Head Start has long been known as the largest and most familiar early childhood program in the United States. It was founded in 1964 to wage the war against poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which was the major weapon in an "unconditional war on poverty." President Johnson declared a war "not only to relieve the symptoms of poverty but to cure it;

and, above all, to prevent it." Although the legislation did not mandate Head Start or any similar program, it did direct OEO to pay special attention to the needs of young people (Zigler & Anderson, 1979).

An evolving conception of government during the early 1960's considered it the government's responsibility to help disadvantaged groups to compensate for inequality in social or economic conditions. Sargent Shriver, President Johnson's chief general for the War on Poverty, assembled a group of people who came up with a program that would provide comprehensive services. Head Start was proposed by an interdisciplinary panel chaired by Dr. Robert E. Cooke, professor of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, a man with close ties to the Kennedy family. The panel, charged with considering the kinds of programs potentially effective to increase achievement and opportunities for the poor, targeted the preschool population for assistance. The panel recommended that the preschool effort be comprehensive, including health, education, and social services, to compensate for the children's lack of the kinds of experiences and opportunities available to economically advantaged families (Steiner, 1976).

As part of the OEO efforts to implement the community action provision of the act, Head Start was suggested as a program that would be "a microcosm of community action." It would offer major advantages beyond the services it would provide to children and their families. It would have a visible emotional impact as a symbol of OEO's potential. The program would fulfill community action obligations by involving parents in planning the centers. Parents could also obtain jobs as aides. Shriver hoped that Head Start would bring together all of the different resources within different local agencies on one target, the child that is poor, and their family (Ross, 1979).

The special importance of Head Start was said to be its provision of a unique range of services. It combined day care with medical and dental treatment, emphasized both the child's psychological development and school readiness, and introduced social services into the child's home environment, plus provided education for the parents (Ross, 1979).

Project Head Start began in the summer of 1965 with 561,359 children enrolled in 11,068 centers. Cooke's panel had warned that it would be more beneficial to provide comprehensive programs for fewer students than to reach vast numbers with limited programs. However, due to the demand for the program and the way it was advertised, vast

numbers wanted to participate. According to Steiner (1976), Head Start achieved its instant and continuing popularity by focusing on one model of service, organized centers serving preschool children.

When Head Start first began little attention was given to what type of preschool program was likely to be most effective, so traditional nursery school programs were promulgated. The Daily Program I for the Child Development Center was used as the curriculum document. This document stressed the importance of learning through living and defined curriculum as "all the experiences which the Center makes possible for its children"(Project Head Start, n.d. p.12). It emphasized the importance of materials and schedules and focused on four aspects of teaching: language, curiosity, self-image, and discipline. The teachers were also encouraged to be sensitive to children's interests.

Although Head Start has received some blows regarding its effectiveness on cognitive development, its popularity has remained constant over the last 30 years due to the following factors:

1. Effective support by parents, staff, and advocacy groups such as the Children's Defense Fund;
2. A positive image in the media;
3. Strong bipartisan congressional support;
4. Robust, reliable research demonstrating the long-term cost-effective benefits of Head Start; and

5. Powerful converts to the program who, after working with Head Start, have become advocates, a sequence of events which Zigler notes is quite common (Zigler, 1985 p. 606).

The Head Start program is based on the premise that all children share certain needs, and that children of low-income families, in particular can benefit from a comprehensive developmental program to meet those needs. The Head Start Program approach is based on the philosophy that a child can benefit from a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program to foster development and remedy problems as expressed in a broad range of services. The child's entire family as well as the community must be involved. The program should maximize the strengths and unique experiences of each child. The family, which is perceived as the principle influence on the child's development, must be a direct participant in the program. Local communities are allowed latitude in developing creative program designs so long as the basic goals, objectives and standards of a comprehensive program are adhered to(Head Start Training Manual 1993).

The overall goal of the Head Start program is to bring about a greater degree of social competence in children of low income families. Social competence entails the child's everyday effectiveness in dealing with the current environment as well as gaining and developing those

competencies and responsibilities needed later in school and life. Social competence takes into account the interrelatedness of cognitive and intellectual development, physical and mental health, nutritional needs and other factors that enable a developmental approach to helping children achieve social competence.

Montessori

Maria Montessori was a physician who first worked with mentally handicapped children. She later applied what she had learned working with these children to the education of normal children in her school the *Casa dei Bambini*, in a working class neighborhood in Rome. While Montessori created a unique approach to early childhood education, it was rooted in the work of earlier philosophers and educators, including Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Itard, and Seguin. Her curriculum rested most heavily on the work of Seguin, who devised a system of education for handicapped children (Kramer, 1988).

Like Froebel, Montessori believed that children's development unfolded naturally. Maria Montessori saw knowledge as being based in children's perceptions of the world, rather than coming from manipulating objects that represent abstract symbols. Because of this, she felt that a

child's senses must be trained. Montessori developed numerous materials and activities to train the senses. Each material was to be used in a specific way, and most of the materials were self-correcting and could be used by children without teacher supervision. Montessori's program also included exercises in practical life, such as washing, getting dressed, and cleaning tables. These activities were meant to help children function independently. Montessori also included reading and writing, nature study, gardening, arithmetic, and geography in her program (Montessori, 1964).

The major goal of the Montessori program is to prepare children for life. Montessori is a philosophy, methodology, and curriculum premised on the idea that children have absorbent minds and an innate desire to learn. The Montessori method places the responsibility for learning on the student. Given the proper environment and freedom, children will direct their own learning activities. The teacher in this situation is a dynamic link between the class environment and the student, and it is through this link that learning takes place.

Maria Montessori viewed the knowing process of the child as a basically different function from that of the adult. In her book The Absorbent Mind, she characterized the child's knowing in the years from

birth to six as a function of sensory absorption, in contrast with adult reasoning. According to Montessori, knowledge comes totally by absorption through the senses, without any effort on the part of the child during the first three years of a child's life.

Montessori believed that external stimuli act directly upon sense organs and that the external stimulus activates a motor impulse in a nerve center. The child's internal reaction is an automatic biological or psychochemical change. She believes that the child's mind copies the external environment.

The belief in the necessity to capitalize on the child's spontaneous activity also led to the design of materials that would make it easy for children to know what to do with little or no instruction. these materials were said to be self-correcting. In other words children should be able to judge their own success and see the need to correct errors without teacher intervention.

In the Montessori Method (1909/1964) the curriculum is conceptualized in terms of eight categories of activities: 1.) practical life exercises, 2.) Muscular education, 3.) nature in education, 4.) manual labor, 5.) education of the senses, 6.)language, writing, and reading, 7.) exercise in silence, 8.) arithmetic.

Currently, there are two distinct approaches to Montessori education. The Association Montessori International (AMI) tries to maintain the program as originally conceived by Maria Montessori. The American Montessori Society (AMS), on the other hand, feels that Montessori schools should incorporate new knowledge about how children learn. AMS schools often adapt the Montessori curriculum to include activities not present in the original Montessori classroom, including play and arts programs.

Public Preschool

There have been several early childhood programs designed to meet the needs of a particular population. According to Madaus, (1988) public schools have used the results of high stakes tests (those whose results are seen as either being right or wrong by students, teachers, administrators, parents or the general public as being used to make important decisions that immediately and directly affect them) in developing programs and identifying children who may be at risk for school failure.

According to Albert Shanker (1991), there are several reasons why public schools should sponsor early childhood education. The first advantage is that the public education system already has in place

organizations experienced in administering large and complex programs. This system already has staff that are knowledgeable in child development and appropriate activities to build a sound yet flexible program.

Another aspect which aids the public school sponsorship is the formal cooperation of other relevant agencies and groups which brings about order and defrays chaos and fragmentation of services. Public schools can offer both child care through after school programs as well as hours with a deliberate developmentally appropriate curriculum. When schools work with other agencies to provide services to a family or a child, plans are better coordinated to provide comprehensive services. Public school sponsorship of early childhood education does not require uniformity or rigidity. School districts would be free to expand and vary their services to meet local needs or fund other agencies or even non-profit organizations that were providing high-quality services.

The universal availability of public schools is another advantage to public school sponsorship. They provide services in a central location of the community. Just as public education is free of cost so should these services or at least on a sliding fee scale. Schools are also typically sensitive to confidentiality.

The public education system is best equipped to offer or coordinate the variety of services such as health and nutrition that support a child's development. The safety and health record of public schools is outstanding considering the millions of children they serve every day. Public school personnel are also sensitive to the special needs of handicapped children.

The final argument for public school sponsorship of early childhood education is the staffing issue of qualified personnel. The licensing or credential checking system is in place in state and local departments of education to help ensure that quality standards for early childhood education staff are both promulgated and monitored.

Many states are becoming involved in early childhood education. At the 1989 "Education Summit" in Charlottesville, VA, the President and the state governors met to determine national goals in education. The idea that children would start school "ready" to learn became one of the six national education goals. Under this goal were three objectives:

1. All disadvantaged and disabled children will have access to high quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school.

2. Every parent in America will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping his or her preschool child learn; parents will have access to the training and support they need.
3. Children will receive the nutrition and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and the number of low birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.

In developing the necessary protocol to achieve these goals the President and the nation's governors came to the conclusion that the federal government should work with the states to develop and fully fund the early intervention strategies that would be necessary in changing and restructuring programs and creating new ones that could meet these goals and objectives. This group agreed that all eligible children should have access to Head Start, Chapter I, or some other successful preschool program with strong parental involvement. Specifically they declared that "our first priority must be to provide at least one year of preschool for all disadvantaged children." (NSBA, 1990 p.5)

Several states have incorporated early childhood initiatives into their state budgets. Since 1979, at least 11 states and New York City have passed legislation to support early childhood programs. Some

states such as New Jersey, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia, are using existing funds which support the regular school program are being filtered to support early childhood education.

In the state of Ohio, prior to the passage of H.B. 152, public school preschool grant funds were available to school districts to provide developmentally appropriate preschool education programs for three and four year old children whose families were at or below the 185% of the poverty level. However in July of 1994, school districts that received public school preschool grants were required to provide comprehensive services in accordance to Head Start Performance Standards to income eligible three and four year old children. Age eligible, but over income eligible children were enrolled in public school preschool programs on a tuition basis using a sliding fee scale.

According to the Public School Early Childhood Study (1987) there are program characteristics that determine program quality. Using standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), this study revealed five major characteristics that indicate quality: 1.) staffing patterns, 2.) teacher qualifications, 3.) comprehensive services, 4.) curriculum, and 5.) parent participation. These quality indicators are very similar to those used by Head Start.

Private Day Care

There is no doubt that the expansion of employment opportunities for women has had a tremendous affect on the traditional child care practices in our country. Economic concerns prompted by inflation and other economic ills have caused many women to seek employment outside the home. The high divorce rate has resulted in many single parent families necessitating care for children during the parent's absence. The almost total disappearance of the extended family means that most of these women must find child care assistance in the community outside the biological family. The single parent, often without additional support, has no choice but to maintain full-time employment.

According to (Seefeldt, 1974) in 1967 nearly all of the child care facilities in the United States were privately operated. Conducted as businesses for the profit of the operator, private child facilities offer to provide a service to families who can pay.

Private programs range from the highly structured to the unstructured programs of simply meeting the personal needs of children such as feeding and toileting. Some promise to teach the young child to read before the age of three, others are devoted to implementing theories of child growth and development. Some programs adhere to a specific

methodology such as Montessori or Berieter. Unfortunately, few states have adequate control over the licensing of private programs; however, owners and operators have found that when they work together to establish standards for themselves, they, as well as the parents and children benefit. Licensing of private child care programs assures the operators and families certain protections and attainment of at least minimal standards of care.

There are several types of private day care that have been started to meet the needs of working parents. Many businesses provide day care for their employees. According to Gail Richardson (1996) there are many reasons why businesses should invest in child care. Not providing child care can have a negative impact on employers. Worker turnover will rise and productivity will fall. One third of employees need it. Employees have trouble finding care that is both affordable and of good quality. there are 67% of employees who do not need child care but who are affected by someone else's child care problems. By the year of 2000, two thirds of new job entrants will be women and 75% will be or become mothers. Absenteeism due to child care breakdowns costs U.S. businesses three billion dollars a year. Child care related absences cost

12 firms in Columbus Ohio with 22270 employees, $784,320 per year (Richardson, 1996).

There are other ways in which businesses can provide child care even if it is not on site. Many companies and unions are now directly operating programs for children with other industries supporting child care indirectly. Some industries assign staff responsibility for the establishment of a center or make financial donations and lend support to child care councils. Vouchers, valid for any child care service the employee might select, for full or partial cost of the service, are being considered by some companies.

With the onset of early child hood programs in many colleges and universities, lab schools are being held on site to offer field experience and student teaching opportunities to students. This is especially convenient for those persons who need to do student teaching during the summer months when traditional schools are not in session. Not only does this allow for practice in the field, but also a very useful child care service to families.

With mothers returning to school in increasing numbers, and students socially aware, universities have begun to establish child care programs for children of students and staff. Children of faculty members

have traditionally found child care programs in university laboratory nursery school; now students and staff can benefit from such programs as well.

Many states are assisting private day care providers through Block Grants and Loan Programs. For example, in Ohio these grant and loan programs were available to all counties in January of 1992 from the Ohio Department of Human Services to assist in starting new child care programs, adding infant and toddler slots, starting or expanding school age programs, or otherwise increasing enrollment of facilities that serve low income families. Priority was given to those applications that would serve low income communities, geographically distressed areas, areas with a high concentration of Aid to Dependent Children, or an area with a very high or very low population density.

Program Effectiveness

Studies have been conducted on a national basis that evaluate and analyze the effects of a specific program. While no study has been completed that analyzes the effects of four programs, these individual studies help to highlight the benefits of a specific program. For example, a study in Iowa found there was little or not difference between four year old children who attended a preschool program and those that did not

(Koehler, 1993). A like study focused on advantaged children and found the children that attended preschool outperformed the children that went to day care and non-preschool and non-daycare group (Warash, 1991). These studies show that preschool, while not significant in all cases, does effect student outcomes and directly impact the education of young children.

This effect upon young people was also found in the Nicholas County Head Start Program. That program was analyzed over a twelve-year period. This quasi-experimental study found that Head Start made a difference in the areas of promotion, special education, and drop-out rates. Head Start children were advantaged at a .05 degree on 24% of the indicators (Williams, 1988). Significance was also found in a study in Connecticut where reading and math scores were found to improve in older children who had two or more years of day care (Randolph, 1986). This study parallels the effectiveness of day care programs and enhances the need for such programs.

Culturally, the impact of day care programs has been significant. Arenas (1985) studied the educational experiences and the academic progress made by two groups (experimental and controlled) of Hispanic children from Head Start to third grade in a public school. While there

was no significant relationship between the two groups, parallel learning of basic skills occurred between Head Start and public schools. The impact of bilingual education in this study was great, and supports the need for such attention at a public school level.

Grafwallner (1994) studied the relationship of third grade school achievement of rural students from low income families and their histories of attendance in five types of early childhood education or child day care programs. The types of early care programs included Head Start, public school pre-kindergarten, preschool, day care and family day care. While statistically non-significant, the results indicated that low income third grade students who attended preschool, Head Start, or Public school pre-kindergarten programs scored consistently higher than those students who had attended day care or family day care programs. While statistically non-significant, those students who had attended both early care and school age child care programs were scoring higher on two competency based tests than the other groups. Testing independence of attendance in early care programs on placement in special education or Chapter I programs as well as grade retention yielded one significant result. Low income third grade students who had attended rural Head Start are more likely to repeat one grade during their primary years than

students who had attended other early care programs, while none of those who had attended the rural public school's pre-kindergarten programs were retained. A well organized collaboration of rural public schools and the early childhood education community could improve the transition of low income children into primary grades, thereby marginally influencing later school achievement.

It seems that most of the programs examined in this literature review focus on low-income families. There does not seem to be a priority for funding programs that serve the working middle class or the upper class of wealthy clients. If early childhood is to become a program to accessed by all as public education then other provisions will need to be made.

A Model for a Public Preschool Program

The development of an effective public preschool program must include, at least at the onset, a set of criteria designed to implement the instructional strategies of all four preschool programs discussed in this paper. As discussed earlier, preschool programs vary in purpose and in design. Over the years preschool programs have changed and adapted to environmental demands and political agendas. However, the last ten years have developed data that were significant for the development of a

quality public preschool program. This data reflect that public schools are in a position to begin preschool programs using current systems and facilities.

The notion of using public schools for developing new educational programs is not new. In fact, the systems that are in place in most public schools are already flexible enough to handle the preschool program. In most cases, service agencies are already interfacing with many of the families and regional areas. This connection to service agencies is vital to the development of an effective public preschool program. Along with the connection to service agencies there are three important criteria for the development of an effective public preschool program.

First, effective teacher training is critical. Teachers must be trained, licensed, and taught how to work with children between the ages of three to five. This training is now possible in many more colleges and universities. Many states are now offering special licenses in the area of preschool. Since teacher certification is not new to public schools, the addition of preschool certification should not pose a problem. Furthermore, the licensing of preschool facilities will fall naturally within the parameters of local board authority since school district's licensure is done regularly.

Preschool facilities normally should be attached to existing public school buildings and interface with the elementary routine as much as possible. Montessori stresses the importance of student centered responsibility. This aspect alone allows the public preschool to present environmental interchange that will allow the preschool student an opportunity to develop and grow among others while still protected by the preschool curricula and age appropriate activities. This interface with other teachers and facilities helps strengthen the teacher training aspect of public preschool programs.

The connection to a broader school environment is the second important component of an effective public preschool program. Notwithstanding the notion of physical plant, the public school system is aligned with many service agencies and family intervention specialists who can immediately begin work with the preschool family. The direct involvement of families is critical to the success of preschool programming. When parents become involved with preschool and the public school district they tend to stay connected longer and more intensely than when preschool is not linked to public school.

The public preschool environment can also provide early childhood resource centers which allow parents an opportunity to access "one-stop"

shopping for needed services. States like Ohio and Texas are beginning to offer collaborative funding between various other state agencies in an attempt to build these centers. Boards of mental health, mental retardation, and human health services are beginning to develop centers that not only house preschool classrooms but also house areas for family services. The public school environment is excellent for this connection between agencies, schools, and families.

The connection from preschool to kindergarten is also important. A federally sponsored study concluded that one-half of 1,200 schools surveyed did not show any type of communication between kindergarten and preschool (Lewis, 1993), However, the public preschool, by virtue of the environment, can begin to link with kindergarten activities. Teachers can begin to develop dialogue that will strengthen the internal and external links between kindergarten and preschool. This interface also is the link that is required for the third component of an effective preschool program.

Curricula is highly significant in the development of an effective public preschool program. While interfacing with kindergarten in a specific manner, preschool curricula should also become part of a preschool-12 curriculum. Teachers at all levels should discuss, research,

and formulate age appropriate activities for preschool as well as high school students. Since curriculum is already a vital part of public schools, the inclusion of ages three to five should not prove problematic. In fact, the development of sound, developmentally appropriate curricula should be strengthened by the interchange across grade levels. Public schools are the only agencies able to provide this highly significant service of inter and intradisciplinary development.

Preschool curricula should also reflect sensory development and self-correcting activities. Using some of the Montessori principles, preschool teachers can develop programs and activities that will be strengthened by other school staff and yet reflective of the psychological and physiological needs of preschool children.

Public schools are positioned for the development of excellent preschool programs. Teacher training, school environment, parent involvement, and curricula development offer the preschool program a great opportunity for success. Judging by reports from the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, nationally groups want the early years to be a seamless experience for young children and families (Lewis, 1993). This seamless

experience can best be provided in a public school district utilizing the current infrastructure and the best practices discussed in this paper.

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